

Meetings with Remarkable Police Officers

One time in Exeter, Devon, in the 1990s I smiled and nodded in a friendly way to a police constable as I passed him on the street. A minute or two later he came running back to me to question me and search my pockets. When I asked why he came running back and searched me he said that there was “just something” about me which “didn’t seem right somehow”.

Another time in Exeter in the early 2000's when I was working on a night shift I was going to work on a bicycle when a police car stopped and called me over. The driver said “I saw you coming along and I observed that you were not visible”. Those were his exact words.

He explained that he had had a report that somebody on that road was riding a bike without any lights but he could see immediately that my bike did have lights and that the lights were working properly so he instead chose to stop me because he could see that I was not visible. He meant that I didn’t have a yellow reflective waistcoat on but he didn’t seem to be able to say that in ordinary words. For some reason he felt it necessary to speak his weird “saw you coming along and observed that you were not visible” style of sentence construction.

On another occasion, again when I was on my way to nightshift work in Sainsbury's supermarket, a police car containing a policeman and a policewoman stopped and the two officers stepped out of the car to tell me that, although I did have lights on my bicycle, the rear light was looking bit dim and probably needed a new battery.

The policewoman asked me how long I had been in Plymouth. I reminded her that we were not in Plymouth, we were in Exeter. She shrugged that off as if the actual name of the city were somehow unimportant to her.

She also asked me “Don’t you normally wear a hat?” and “Don’t you normally have a beard?” and informed me that I “Should be wearing a yellow armband”. I began to feel that each of these comments “hat”, “beard” and “yellow armband” were thinly veiled antisemitism. She added that I shouldn’t wear black. I reminded her that I wasn’t actually wearing black. I was wearing me cleaners’ uniform ready for my work as a nightshift cleaner in the supermarket. The uniform was blue, not black. She replied “Well, we REGARD that as black”.

On three occasions in my life I have been locked up in police stations and then released without any charges. These were in 1970, 1972 and in 1982. Each time in London.

One time when I lived in Clapham, South London I was stopped by police twice in the same night for “walking without any shoes on at night time”.

One time when I lived in Glastonbury I went for a walk on a hot sunny day. My intention was to walk out of Glastonbury (it's only a small town) and down the road toward Baltonsborough for a mile or two, then turn around and head back into town.

Along the road I was stopped by a police constable who was driving up the road towards Glastonbury. He wanted to know where I was going.

I explained that I was just going for a walk.

He said he needed to know my destination.

I explained that my starting place and my destination were the same. I had started from where I lived at 7a The High Street and my destination was back at 7a again. It was a round trip from where I lived back to where I lived. I was going for a walk. The only destination in *going for a walk* is back home again.

The police constable argued that my destination couldn't be the same place as my starting point. For his purposes he needed me to be going somewhere different to the place from which I had just come.

My lovely walk in the country on a beautiful sunny day was ruined by having a long long argument with a total cretin who had been allowed to wear a uniform and hold a position of authority. Eventually, when he had sufficiently ruined things to suit his purposes I was permitted to carry on walking.

One time when I was working as a cashier in a petrol station in South Wimbledon in 1981 I had just finished the evening shift (eight hours from 3 pm to 11 pm) and I had turned the signs over to "closed". I had cashed up the till and locked the money away and completed the accounts sheet and taken the pump figures and then locked the door. I came out across the forecourt and began walking home when I saw a police car pulling up. The driver wanted to know what I was doing in the petrol station. I explained that I worked there, pointed to the Shell Oil Company uniform shirt and tie I was wearing and showed him the keys to the petrol station front door. He asked where I was going and I explained that I was going home to sleep.

He offered me a lift home in his police car and I declined because it was only a very short walk, approximately one mile, and I always enjoyed walking to work and back. He insisted on giving me a lift.

I said "No thanks, I really prefer to walk. Walking at night is one of the perks of my job. I enjoy the peace and quiet on the walk home and it isn't very far."

He kept insisting and it was beginning to feel as if he was going to either arrest me or continue giving me a hard time if I kept refusing the lift. So I agreed to get in the sodding car and was irritatingly driven home in a police car (to the delight of the curtain twitching neighbours) and, along the way we chatted about modern day policing and whether, as a 28 year old of five feet eight inches, I stood any chance of joining up and becoming a bobby. I really hate it when cretinous car drivers imagine that pedestrians have to be given lifts. Like as if we are all wannabe car drivers.

I really don't like travelling in cars.

I've written about some of the experiences I've had of the misconduct of the police. Being physically attacked in the street, knocked flat on the ground, put in handcuffs and then released without any apology and classed as "a case of mistaken identity". Being visited by detectives on the stroke of midnight. Various false accusations not backed up by even the slightest scrap of evidence. Then there are the bits of bad police behaviour which they do on

purpose and seemingly as a joke. These are things such as asking a cyclist on a pushbike if he knows what speed he was going and what his current tyre pressure is (questions obviously designed for motorists) or asking an old person the sort of questions which they would normally ask a young person (using incomprehensible bits of teenage street slang and expecting the old age pensioner to understand it all).

Every year which goes by we see news reports of police in the UK committing murder, rape and other serious crimes. We see news reports of police racism and sexism and other wrong doings ranging from negligence to incompetence to fraud and tampering with evidence.

The Home Secretary has made a statement saying that respect for the police must be restored. Nowhere in her statement did she mention that lack of respect for the police is caused by the police themselves having no respect for the law. She tried to make it seem as if lack of respect for the police was somehow the general public's fault. Ludicrous!